

Liturgical Space and Human Experience, Exemplified by the Issue of the “Multi-Purpose” Church Building

by

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The expression “liturgical space” suggests, at first hearing, that we shall be trotting out a theological definition. Indeed, we shall not neglect the need for such a definition; but our overriding concern in this present train of thought will be with “human experiences” with relation to space. This implies, of course, a so-called “approach from below,” in contrast to a “theology of liturgical location” dictated by *a priori* theological axioms.

I. The Multi-Purpose Space: a Paradigm of “Reform” Theology

My chosen starting-point is the discussion in the 1950s and 1960s of the so-called “multi-purpose” space. My purpose is to set in confrontation the reasons which led to the advocacy of this concept and the subsequent experiences of the congregations and parishes affected by it. The discrepancy between the two which we shall observe calls for serious attention, and indicates certain conclusions as to how human beings experience space.

When in the 1960s people began to erect multi-purpose structures instead of church buildings confined to liturgical functions, there were more considerations at work than those of merely practical economics. Among the theological presuppositions were the discussion of the demythologization of biblical texts, the positive theological evaluation of secularization for which Gogarten had won a sympathetic hearing, and campaigns for church “reform” and for “new forms of worship.”¹ Whereas previously church construction

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¹ The German-speaking churches’ quest for worship in new forms (including new media, with new relationships within the worshipping body, etc.) was a more comprehensive undertaking than the contemporary interest in “new forms of worship” in English-speaking churches. But for simplicity we use the more familiar English expression [Translator].

had been governed more by liturgically orientated factors (such as the Brotherhood of St Michael or the “Protestant Conference on Church Architecture” led by Oskar Söhngen), from this point onwards church building was more vigorously guided by the forces of reform, forces which had been given increasingly new impetus by the student riots of 1968. Since at the same time massive urban development was taking place, with the emergence of so-called “satellite towns,” the Church was presented with the opportunity to give visible expression to the new ideas in the form of new parish centers. What emerged as the paradigm of this reforming approach was the “open parish center,” which, instead of an ecclesial space, envisaged and provided a single main area for variable use, both for services and for other functions.

Tied up with this program was, for example, the abandonment of “liminal anxiety,” preoccupation with boundaries. While emphasis was being given both to the role of the church building as a welcoming-place for everybody, and also to the deliberate availability of multi-purpose rooms for multifarious forms of communication (even for local initiatives like town meetings, First Aid courses, dance groups, and political parties), forfeiting the conventional visual image of a church seemed to be a cost worth paying. Forfeiting the projection of one’s own image was given a theological rationale by appeal to the concept of “church existing for others,” as advocated by Bonhoeffer and others. As part of this argument, a neutral—ethically and ideologically neutral—outward appearance for the parish center was called for, to do away with liminal anxiety. The church space itself was not to be sacral space, but an area which could be used not only for services, but equally for other functions—parish celebrations, meetings—and must therefore not be given a single univocal character either by the seating arrangements or by such dominating features as altar, pulpit, or font, nor even by its fundamental shape and atmosphere. What was to give shape and atmosphere to the parish center was not worship alone, but the whole multiplicity of the forms of the “communication of the Gospel.”

What was exciting in this talk of multi-purpose space was the explicit theological argumentation. The multi-purpose area came to be envisioned as an essentially square room with no specifically churchly character (no cross, no works of religious art, no frescoes or stained glass), with movable furniture and movable pulpit and so on. In theory, the issue was a confrontation with conventional ideas of the Church’s space, ideas which had, of course, developed through the years but had nonetheless been seen as questionable in the theological discussions in every generation.

To pick on one representative example, let me sum up the arguments put forward at the 1965 Bad Boll conference on church architecture, on the subject of the chapel which was planned at that conference and later made

a reality by Weinbrenner. The charge of obsession with merely functional criteria simply cannot be sustained in this case. The lines of thought pursued by the New Testament scholar Eduard Schweizer and by Werner Simpfendörfer, the two keynote speakers from the theological side, are theological in nature, through and through. What was at stake was the demand for a “provisional approach to architecture,” as a sign of the Christian assembly’s being essentially a pilgrim people in the world.² The core of the conference was the concept of “worship.” Eduard Schweizer, addressing this topic, developed the view that, in Rom. 12:1ff. and 1 Peter 2:8-3:9, the concepts of “worship” and of “the every-day” are closely connected. With relation to the issue of place, Schweizer said:

In the New Testament there is nothing which is holy in contradistinction to any profane zone—or, to put it better, everything is holy, nothing any longer is profane, because the world belongs to God, and because the world is the place where God is to be praised and thanked. That is to say, we are called, from the outset, to do everything possible to obviate the misconception that there could be any such thing as a sacred *temenos*, a temple precinct, cut off from the world, or any such thing as a particular individual or group, within the community of faith, more holy or more profane than others.³

Werner Simpfendörfer appealed to these considerations in his affirmation of the secularization process with a demand that the Church should become “worldly”:

In our secularized world, the life of worship will have to start from the assumption that the inherited dichotomy of world and church sacred and secular, can no longer be preserved—indeed, it must no longer be preserved. . . . The understanding of the life of worship as profane opens up a new perspective on the unity between the congregation’s everyday life and its meeting for worship.⁴

The prime duty is understood as “participation in God’s mission,” as “being sent,” as “serving presence.” This means that the church must be envisioned from the viewpoint of the world, of the *idiotes*, the “outsider,” the

² Martin Görbing, Hans Grass, Horst Schwebel, *Planen—Bauen—Nutzen: Erfahrungen mit Gemeindezentren* (Giessen 1981) 132ff.

³ Bad Boll conference minutes: see Eduard Schweizer, *Gottesdienst im Neuen Testament* (Zurich 1958) 2.

⁴ Werner Simpfendörfer in Bad Boll conference minutes: “Prognosen für das gottesdienstliche Leben—Fordern sie das bauliche Provisorium?” 1 [“Do our predictions of changing worship life demand the ‘provisional architecture?’”].

“stranger and sojourner” of 1 Cor. 14. “This is the theological basis for demanding flexibility in worship and therefore for also demanding a ‘provisional’ approach to church building as the architectural principle which opens the door to adapting styles to the needs of various assemblies.” According to Simpfendörfer, this leads to further requirements:

1. A range of possible assemblies corresponding to the range of varieties of missionary situations;
2. These various gatherings must be given an overt character as worship groups by means of a direct statement of their purposes, and not simply by means of religious or cultic signals which we are expected to understand without explanation;
3. A realistic frame of mind, governed by circumstances, on the church’s “aesthetic stance” in relation to its accommodation.⁵

For Simpfendörfer the issue is world-relatedness as opposed to withdrawal from the world, profaneness as opposed to sacredness, service as opposed to a representative role. Instead of the “public church, the teaching church,” he calls for the “serving church.” Thinking must start with the clear recognition of what is needed; from this perspective one must address oneself to the points at which the Church can anchor itself in the world, and then build the Church’s house in such a way “that, with the minimum of fuss, it can be used for the most diverse purposes.”⁶

Theses of this character, with their provocative expression, would do credit to a professional church planner or organizer; but what is impressive about Simpfendörfer’s presentation is that he undergirded it with an expansion of the theological concept of worship. Whereas Eduard Schweizer called on Paul’s help to widen the understanding of worship, Simpfendörfer offers this translation of the first of Luther’s 95 Theses: “When our Lord Jesus Christ says ‘Repent,’ he means that the entire life of his believers should be a daily worship.”

Eberhard Weinbrenner, who was later to build the chapel of the Bad Boll Academy (it was the planning of this which provided the occasion for the 1965 conference), took up the idea of “provisional architecture,” and worked out the following “architectural implications” for liturgical space:

1. A festive space designed for diverse purposes.
2. A bright space, comfortable and easily adaptable.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

3. Individual seating, comfortable and easily rearranged.
4. A free-standing lectern which could be readily be put aside, and a movable communion table.
5. Bright, uncluttered walls, to accommodate pictorial aids to meditation.
6. A shaping of space which can accommodate small groups as readily as large ones, can hold them together and at the same time leave them freedom.
7. An essential presupposition is that this space, in terms of building material, must be modest, and must refrain from any cheap effect, including theatrical exploitation of light, while at the same time maintaining the highest standards of architectural quality.⁷

At the heart of the Bad Boll thinking was the widening of the concept of worship. This was not explored in terms of the nature of worship reflected in its phenomenology, history, and essence; the entire weight of priority fell upon the working out of the ethical or socio-ethical dimension of worship —“sanctification of the world,” “mission,” “service,” etc.—in sharp contradiction to cultic or sacral preoccupations. Since we are in the happy position of having these theological lines of thought in solid form before our very eyes, in the shape of their practical results, their architectural realization, it is easier in this case than usual to fail to appreciate their greatness and their limitation.

The approach is essentially that of ethics, specifically social ethics, which means that the demands implicit in the nature of worship are addressed, not the meaning of worship as an act of divine grace. The concept of worship is deepened in relation to the world, without being adequately opened up in terms of its depth.

II. The Multi-Purpose Space in the Dialectic of Reforming Paradigm versus Experience of Space

In a research project, published in book form as *Planen—Bauen—Nutzen* (“Planning—Building—Using”),⁸ the Institute for Contemporary Church

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ See above, n. 2. Part of its remarks are as true now as when the book was published in 1981.

Architecture and Art examined seventeen parish centers with multi-purpose buildings over a period of years, with the following conclusions:

Part of the fate of all these multi-purpose spaces was that they were all altered in the direction of being specifically *church* space. The stages of these alterations are typically these:

1. The space was separated increasingly from other parts of the parish center, and used exclusively for services.
2. There came a point in time after which the arrangement of altar, pulpit, and font was no longer altered.
3. The altar area was given special dignity (typically by means of a carpet).
4. On or behind the altar, a cross was set up.
5. People feel compelled to adorn the walls (e.g., with wall curtains).
6. The main furniture (altar, pulpit, font) is replaced with new items of more expensive material,
7. The flooring is altered (typically with parquet or stone blocks).
8. Transparent windows get replaced with stained or painted glass, whether pictorial or abstract.
9. The parish center has a campanile or bell-tower added to it.
10. The parish center, originally named after its neighborhood, receives an ecclesiastical name, and is henceforth called a "church." (For example: the Marburg-Richtsberg Parish Center is now called St Thomas's Church; another parish center became the "Emmaus Church.")
11. The most far-reaching change took place in Baunatal, home of Volkswagen. The ecumenical parish center, completed in 1973, distinguished by its supreme simplicity, is now no longer used either by the Roman Catholic or by the Evangelical [Protestant] Church. In its place both Roman Catholic and Evangelical congregations have built their separate new churches in which the distinctive denominational, "churchy," character is emphasized.

I want to insist, and keep on insisting, that the rationale of the multi-purpose space, however much conditioned by its time, was nonetheless a serious theological position. It appeals to the overcoming by Jesus Christ of the notions of sacred and profane, to the wider understanding of worship and to the hallowing of everyday life. It strives to be "the church for others," and to avoid all self-advertisement and self-exaltation. Nonetheless, the

multi- purpose space was not accepted by the congregations. The subsequent alterations showed that, from the congregations' point of view, other concepts were at work. These concepts, in the cases of the already existing multi-purpose spaces, contributed to their radical alteration—the extreme result being that multi-purpose accommodation ceased totally to be used for services, and was replaced by churches. What happened in these situations?

We might perhaps reduce the whole course of events to a simple formula: a theological stance was corrected by human factors. “Human experience” could not content itself with one particular theology. The correction in the direction of “a proper church” developed undramatically in the course of events. But why? What types of experience and what patterns of thought and imagination have won out here?

The reasons which led the congregations to adapt their multi-purpose accommodation may be described as follows:

1. Setting the space designed for worship on the same level of value as the other parochial rooms is clearly not found acceptable. The congregation prefer to single out the liturgical role by giving the liturgical space a distinctive character, a degree of immutability. This does not mean establishing what Mircea Eliade has taught us to call a sacral “axis of the world,” nor turning one spot into “the heavenly Jerusalem” in the early Christian or medieval sense. The meaning is simply this: the liturgical room must be more precious, more valued, than the rest of the rooms.

2. Among the alterations made it is noticeable that in the background the guiding image of the “church” is always exerting an influence. The changes include the addition of crosses, sculpture, stained glass, towers, bells, etc., all of them elements historically associated with the notion of what “church” should look like. We could go further, and say the suburb without a history needs to latch on to historical traditions to link the local church with the Church which has been in action through the centuries, This adds a new level of meaning to the artistry of stained glass and the sound of bells.

3. Bound up with all this is the longing to have a sense of identity, mediated by experience of place. This is true not only of active parishioners; the same longing is often met in people without church attachment. The uniformity of new suburbs, places without historic buildings and with no historically evolved social structure, evokes longings for places and objects which create identity. The Church is expected to make itself available for the provision of such identity, by means of its architectural presence.

III. The Contrast between a Theological and an Anthropological Discussion of Space

Such notions as the expectation that a space for church life should claim something for itself, some degree of historically redolent churchly character, some aid to a sense of identity—these are by no means uncommon. Obviously, these anthropological facts received inadequate attention during the development of the multi-purpose concept. But how could theological discussion so radically misunderstand the attitude of human beings to space? Where did things go wrong?

In my submission, the essential error lay in a failure in discussing multi-purpose accommodation to take due note of the anthropological dimension—human beings in their relationship with space. Let me illustrate this with an example. Let us assume that, while we are preparing a church building project, we come to realize that the church is primarily “the church for others,” and that the institution must deny itself any self-assertive display. A voluntary, freely chosen *kenosis* could lead to abstention from any sort of decoration in carrying out the project, and to settling for spaces which would be solely and exclusively utilitarian “instruments” calling no attention at all to themselves. The theological notion of surrendering self-expression, self-portrayal, for the sake of others, has a high moral dignity. Nonetheless, from the point of view of the humankind/space relationship, the watch-word “church for others” could readily suggest a very different result. In a specific situation, I mean, service to others might consist exactly in creating something distinctive (say, in color and shape) in a monotonous environment, to provide people with an opportunity of finding an identity. That is, translating the notion of the “church for others” into architectural, spatial, terms lays upon us the obligation to give the relationship of human beings to space, exactly as experienced in the unique way of the particular locality, a central place in our discussion. A literal translation of a *theologoumenon*, be it never so correct, into spatial terms can lead to a totally mistaken conclusion.

Take another example. People talk about the parish center needing an “open” character, so that from inside there will be nothing of an alienating kind, and equally, so that the unchurched can feel confident about going inside. The architectural implication of this line of thought is often a preference for transparent instead of solid walls, through which the congregation at worship can be aware of the world outside, while the people outside can look in and see the churchgoers. Under some circumstances, this can result

in the congregation inside being disturbed in its worship, and in the non-churchgoers, in occasional visits to worship, failing totally to find whatever it might be they come looking for in the church setting, while still being unable to forget that they are being watched from outside. Opening the congregation to the world is not the same as the openness of the goldfish bowl; for, when the people we want to be open to are looking specifically for shelter, safety, and a certain “intimacy of atmosphere,” then the openness of glass partitions is precisely not the thing we are looking for.

Examples of this sort could be multiplied indefinitely. The lesson to be learned from them is always the same: theological debate on the subject of church and world, parish, worship, and so on, needs—for love’s sake—to be complemented by an anthropological debate in which the relationship of humanity to space is given the status and treatment it deserves.

If we interpret “architecture” literally, we translate it as the *tektura* of the *archai*, the forming of the archetypal images. Applying this reading, in the light of present-day practice, would make architecture and the calling of the architect seem archaic and over-estimated. What would it mean to give form to these archetypes—the archetypal hut, or temple, or tower? If we simply tried to give physical form to archetypes, we should find ourselves in an atavistic thought-world. Our attempts to suggest basic, primeval, ideas would soon look obsolete when contrasted with the glass facades of skyscrapers, which seem to give their massive solidity an ethereal quality. But even if a quest for archetypes translated into bricks and mortar were simply a nostalgic preoccupation with the past, even that would reveal a desideratum not to be ignored. In his study of timeless images and mental images (*Ewige Bilder and Sinnbilder*, Freiburg 1968), Mircea Eliade analyzed “the symbolism of ‘the center.’” For Eliade, the “center of the world” is an archetypal image. It is the place where, in the realm of the “horizontal,” the vectors of heaven meet, and where, in the “vertical” dimension, links are established both upwards, with the gods, and downwards, with the world of the dead.

However much the particular instances of the symbolism of the center (the world-mountain, the cosmic tree, the central column, the navel of the world, the Ka’aba, etc.) and their associated symbolisms of spiritual ascent, may differ among themselves, all these diverse systems, in their own ways, point to this in common—stability and coherence in the face of mutability and the insecurity of the process of living. Even if we cannot find a home in ancient mythological systems, “recollection” of this kind can still be alive: the church, the mosque, the temple, as a form of “center of the world,” wherever any meaningful religious dimension confronts us, wherever in some exceptional way, and by means of distinctive signs, God imparts himself.

Even if we distrust Eliade's or any similar imagery of the center, there are still three anthropological categories linked to architecture which we must not ignore:

1. From an anthropological standpoint, every space for occupation exists first and foremost to provide shelter: originally, shelter from wind and weather, from the cold or from excessive sunlight, from wild beasts or hostile neighbors. When related (for example) to the group of functions under the general heading of "dwelling place," this implies that the occupancy of the people involved is protected and preserved. And the accommodation of a parish center must also have a protective function of this sort.

2. The fact that functions are so diverse means that characterless spaces which do not indicate their role can give no satisfaction. On the contrary, the sheer multiplicity of life-events creates an imperative need for a built environment which helps to give order to those events. Architecture cannot evade the responsibility for marking off particular spaces from the amorphous and undefinable host of possibilities, and for thus providing a sense of order, so that several specific phases of life can even happen at all.

3. With these two functions of creating space, of doing architecture—that is, the guarantee of protection and the marking of differences between occasions and events—we must join a third: the statement of values. In every single architectural decision some statement of value is enshrined: whether or not some special feature (altar, pulpit, font, organ) is given special dignity within a liturgical area; what arrangement of seating is selected; whether or not works of art will be incorporated; and so on. Even the proportions and balance of dimensions and the choice of materials say something on this issue. The notion of shaping a space in a neutral way, open in every direction, is mistaken in that every decision about shape and form is at the same time a sort of statement of value; neutrality, in the strict sense (*ne utrum* = "neither of the two"), then, is simply impossible.

In anthropological terms, therefore, the contribution of architecture, in relation to life-processes, can be summed up under three headings: the guarantee of protection; the structuring and ordering of life-processes; the statement of values.⁹

⁹ On the subject of humanity and architecture, see K. L. Spengemann, *Architektur Wahrnehmen*, Bielefeld: Karl Kerber Verlag 1993. Also available are significant papers and monographs (including experimental work in schools of architecture and with art classes) analyzing human reactions and interactions, individual and corporate, within spatial contexts, under differing spatial conditions. In his book *Der Raum, Bauegefüge, Bild und Lebenswelt*, Akademie

IV. The Parish Center Seen in Terms of "Humanity and Space"

What can we say about the use of space in the parish center in terms of the anthropology of space, without conducting complicated experiments or developing new theories? I should prefer rather to concentrate on the activities which we encounter in the various rooms of the parish center. In what follows I shall try to sum up church events, so to speak, in simple catchwords and to use these catchwords as vantage-points for examining the different spaces. I am well aware of my presuppositions dictated by time and place, as well as by the social and cultural milieu of my reflections, but I have to say that my basic understanding of the church in terms of the Gospel has not failed to exercise a definitive role in the account which follows. In any other country, let alone on any other continent and under differing social or cultural conditions, or at any other time—say, fifty years earlier or later—a different picture would have emerged. In full awareness that reflections like these cannot be free from presuppositions, I set off in quest of catchwords which will link the church's activities with the various spatial subdivisions of the parish center.¹⁰

der bildenden Künste 13 (Vienna 1986), Herbert Kuck uses photographs, drawings, and text to give an overview of the most important methods for the comprehension of how human beings interact with spatial environment. This work is the most comprehensive study of this topic ever published. Kuck devotes a large part of his attention to church-related examples. I hope readers will forgive me for simply referring them to this work, and not attempting myself here to develop a comprehensive theory of humanity's relation to space in terms of philosophy, phenomenology, semiotics, relationship psychology, group dynamics, etc. Anyone wanting to take these matters further will find Kuck's introduction (not least its bibliography of 175 items) an excellent starting-point.

¹⁰ The function of space enclosed by building is to protect, or even to provide the basic prerequisites of, expressions of life. In the case of a dwelling, this protection or facilitation of expressions of life relates to habitation, eating, drinking, sleeping, bathing, etc. This concerns the *private domain* of living. Industrial plant and factory buildings are concerned with the *work domain*. The building of the *public domain* includes government buildings, town halls, and also theaters and cultural centers. The *leisure domain* (e.g., swimming pools, sports centers, tennis courts, arboreta, if such things can be accepted as a distinct domain) may be classed as a separate sub-type within the public domain. Within this scheme, the parish center must be subsumed under the public domain. This would imply a commitment to communication, a commitment with significant social and cultural aspects. But this would not give an adequate account of the parish center. Quite apart from the public domain, overlapping as it does with the leisure domain, we must also say that there is a cultic domain, in which the parish center belongs. In other cultures and in the case of historic churches, the cultic domain is made obvious to everybody by a markedly different appearance (of the temple, the stupa, the mosque, the church). But this applies also to the parish center. By the legal sentence of dedication the liturgical space is brought under special protection. Whereas, for example, in the case of buildings protected by

The purpose of setting up a parish center is for the assembling of persons in acts of worship and for other functions in which the parish congregation fulfills its responsibilities. In each of the differing places within the building a distinctive form of church activity dominates the respective scene.

1. Entrance

For example: the entrance area must be seen in terms of the work of invitation. The shaping of the entrance should be so arranged that people are actively encouraged to enter the building. A foyer should contain an offer of extra space, in its own right. In the course of the history of church design, the role of the entrance has been variously conceived. Whereas the narthex of fourth-century basilicas had dim pillared porticoes, with a fountain in the center of the atrium, we often find, in the tympanum above the entrance arch of Norman and Gothic churches, a portrayal of the Last Judgment. In the Baroque period we meet, among other things, ornate open staircases leading up to the entrance portal. In today's situation, it seems to me to suffice if full force is given to the watchword "welcome," without any obligation to insist on any specific plan or arrangement of specific materials, such as glass. At the same time, however, one must be aware that an effectively inviting character in the entrance is bound up with an apt provision of space and an appealing layout.

2. Parish rooms

The rooms to which the foyer leads, or which cluster around the foyer, are the usual meeting places for the congregation's weekday life. The activities vary from parish to parish, according to local parochial interests. While there are of course parish centers where every day more than a hundred people turn up for miscellaneous purposes—drinking coffee, Lonely Hearts Club, Pensioners' Keep-Fit, study of modern Hebrew for the next vacation in the Holy Land—there are also others which stand virtually empty for the

preservation orders, the care of monuments as monuments has a right to be taken into account, the same approach cannot take precedence over liturgical considerations. Only the Church itself has the right to determine what counts as "liturgical considerations" vis-à-vis the general public. In the case of physical damage to liturgical equipment or of disturbance to liturgical proceedings, in extreme cases, the civil law against blasphemy might be invoked. However "profane" or "secular" may be the effect projected by the parish center, the liturgical space, from the legislators' point of view, is still subject to special treatment. If the legislature is prepared to protect the liturgical process, it would be very odd if the congregation ceased to see anything special in the domain of worship.

entire week. In the case of the busy parish, the activities could be characterized as mutual sharing, learning, help, counsel, painting, weaving, celebration. Parish rooms are to be understood almost exclusively in purely functional terms. Attention must be given to differing sizes for (e.g.) a general meeting of the parish or a lecture with slides at one extreme, for Session, parish council, or confirmation class at the other, as well as to special equipment for rooms for youth activities, for painting, for weaving, etc. Most rooms will have to be permanently available for a variety of events. It would be better, nonetheless, if, to some tolerable degree, the individual groups could leave behind “traces” of themselves, so that to a certain extent they can identify themselves with their particular room.

3. The liturgical space

After the “multi-purpose building instead of a church” notion had been wrecked on the rocks of reality, the center of interest has been reclaimed by the question of the character of the liturgical space. The distinct dignity once again ascribed to the liturgical space and its special role, in contrast to other parish accommodation and other functions, after the demise of the multi-purpose concept, is a datum on which there is no going back. In this area, newly understood, the coffee table, the social dance, the political meeting would be experienced as an intrusion; at the very least, any repeated alteration of the main items of furniture would hardly prove acceptable. At the same time, “superior” events like sacred concerts and poetry readings would not fall under the same condemnation.

Adverse criticism of the multi-purpose concept does not, however, mean any return to the rigidity of the 1951 Rummelsberg program. Styles of worship have become more diverse. Apart from the services envisaged in the official service-books, there are services for families and young people, that is, worship in freer forms; yet at the very same place an Evangelical Mass, the full formal worship of the main Protestant churches, may also be celebrated. Nor must we forget that church attendance on the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity will be different from that on Christmas Eve. Due weight must continue to be given to the difference both in the character and in the attendance of different services; but that does not mean a new edition of the multi-purpose notion.

4. Set places for the main furniture

Despite numerous arguments in favor of adaptability, then, I regard it as essential that the principal elements of furnishing, altar, pulpit, and font, should have a permanent location. (The organ is usually stationary in any

case.) In order to undertake so important a task as finding a set place for these items, an extended trial period is probably needed. During this trial period, not only different arrangements of place but also differences of size and overall design of each item should be tested. The trial period complete, a definitive and binding decision should be reached.

5. *The altar table: liturgy “versus populum”*

The altar is not an *ara*, but a *mensa*. It is the place where bread and wine are distributed as Christ’s body and blood, and received in faith. It is also the place with which important liturgical elements, apart from sermon and readings, are linked. It would well fit the invitation-character of the communion table if it were to extend out into the congregation, instead of being turned away from the congregation and stuck far off in a corner. In this matter, we can appeal to principles as to the meaning of the altar which were worked out at the Second Vatican Council, in which the celebrant, or president of the assembly, utters the presidential elements of the liturgy from behind the altar, *versus populum*, that is, facing God’s people. We cannot deny that the *versus populum* principle will be practicable only in some cases, not in all. So as far as possibility allows, it should at least be tried. At the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s communion guests would receive communion as *circumstantes*, as those who “stand around” the communion table.

6. *Pulpit*

If we interpret the sermon as a dialogue-initiating address by the preacher on the relevance of the Gospel within a particular situation, based on a scriptural text, then it makes sense for the listening congregation to elevate the pulpit only to that extent which will make possible general eye-contact as well as hearing, and to give it a location which will give the hearers a chance to identify with the preacher. Raising it too high or placing it too far apart would endanger the dialogue character of preaching, and would encourage too authoritarian a view of the sermon or the preacher. Admittedly, only one individual is speaking, and every one else is listening; but that one individual is a member of the congregation, and is speaking to the others as a brother or sister, and not as a prophet.

7. *Baptism*

The present tendency is to administer baptism within a main service. The most consistent policy would be to set the place of baptism in full view of the congregation. Even in a separate baptismal service, if the furniture were

adaptable, one practical solution would be to gather the numerically smaller baptismal congregation around the font and the altar, to experience the liturgy of baptism most intensely.

8. *Establishing a stable liturgical zone*

As has been urged above, altar and pulpit and font should be given permanent positions, and in such a relationship one with another that it becomes possible to speak of a stable liturgical zone. In planning this, of course, allowance will be made for the various services occurring through the year, so that distance between these items of furniture will be big enough, and their size sufficiently limited, not to endanger special forms of service in which (for example) a group of young people may assemble around the altar to lead the intercessions.

9. *Movable seating*

Fixity of the three main features—altar, pulpit, font—desirable as it is, would not exclude a measure of variability in seating arrangements. Naturally, on entering the space for worship the churchgoers should encounter—and this is a fundamental principle—what they recognize as familiar imagery. But they would certainly not be disturbed if the seating were adapted for variously structured forms of worship, or for particularly small or exceptionally large numbers of worshippers expected to attend. Fixed main features plus variability in seating plans—that is the principle I am here commending.¹¹

10. *Organ*

The place of the organ has not yet been mentioned, since the organ usually has a permanent location, and therefore plays no part in the debate on fixity *versus* mobility. Admittedly, a case is often put forwards these days for organ and choir being placed in full view of the congregation, to express the closeness of music and song to the service of the altar and the proclamation of the Gospel. Although it ought to be possible, while listening to the sermon, to see the preacher too, this is not in my judgment absolutely obligatory in the case of the organ and of choral music. So far as space permits, it is certainly preferable to have the organ where the congregation can see it. But if that cannot be, there would be no suggestion of downgrading anyone or anything

¹¹ I have not included the pew *versus* chair controversy. My concern is with the adaptability called for by the situations mentioned—variety in types of service and in sizes of congregations. If the necessary adaptability can be achieved with pews, then choose pews if you wish.

if we heard the tones of the organ from the rear or from one side. In this matter, it would be inept to hem in our room for manoeuvre by any spurious dogma. The primary mode of effectiveness for the organ is by way of the ear, not of the eye.

11. *Artworks*

Inclusion of art works in the liturgical space may involve many types of objects: cross, crucifix, candlesticks, vestments, tapestries, stained-glass windows, murals, paintings, candelabra, etc. According to respective denominational ethos, quite specific items are expected in certain churches: cross, crucifix, candles, vestments in Lutheran, but definitely not in Reformed churches. The question of which artworks should be provided or commissioned depends on many factors which cannot be fully discussed here. We may content ourselves with this comment: present-day art no longer sees itself, like the art of earlier times, as *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaid of theology. Incorporating high-quality contemporary artworks into the church's space therefore involves more intellectual effort and existential confrontation than one can possibly imagine. Avoiding confrontation with contemporary art, escaping that confrontation by facile contentment with superficial attraction, easy digestibility, and stuff already approved by the church—that would be catastrophic. The inescapable decisions involved here are too important, and their implications are too extensive.

12. *Place of silence*

In the setting of a great city, need often arises for a place of silence. What is required is a space which people can visit on working days as well as Sundays, to find rest and recollection for the soul. Wherever possible, further efforts should be made to spell out exactly what such a “place of silence” or some equivalent “meditation niche” might look like in our day, what sort of artworks, what values of light, what form of seating should be chosen for such a milieu. Ought one, for example, to erect a candelabrum or pricket, on Roman Catholic lines, or assist meditation with a lump of rock and bubbling water, as in Helsinki? Wherever “humanity and space” are discussed, the range of interests should not omit this “place of silence.”

V. Is the Liturgical Space a Sacral Space?

We should like to conclude our reflections by pursuing this question: how useful is the concept of the sacral, as applied to liturgical space? In his book, *Sakralität. Ergebnisse neuzeitlicher Architekturästhetik* (Zurich

1979), Christof Martin Werner traces the role of the sacral in the discussion of church architecture. His surprising conclusion is that the notion is really a neo-classical invention of the nineteenth century which made its way into discussions of church architecture by way of Bartning, Cingria, Claudel, and others. In Söhnngen, for example, we find that “even a modern church space not only must be harmonious and tasteful, ‘a nice room,’ but also needs that indefinable ‘something more,’ that something which is called ‘sacral.’”¹² The sacral is given the status of a particular “quality of expression and construction.”

Werner goes on to argue that, for Söhnngen and the other advocates of sacrality, the notion has come to be characterized as a particular style, and that this characterization is bound up with a “sensualistic” definition of sacrality.¹³ The concept was invoked to describe a specific effect produced by a given space, an effect essentially sensual. Werner justifiably observes that this sensualistic description of the sacral is markedly “diffuse,” and that one person will classify as “sacral” things that for another person will seem as “non-sacral” as can be. The notion of a reified holiness—such as is in Roman Catholicism conferred upon a space by means of the dedication of a church—is found wanting.

“Diffuse” as the concept as the sacral may in fact be, when applied to the effect of a particular space, this does not reduce the high level of architectural and artistic quality demanded by the liturgical space, together with its accoutrements and artworks. Admittedly, quality cannot be measured, nor can it forcibly be achieved to order by some effort of our own will. Quality would be that mysterious “something more” that emerges, unforced, incapable of being compelled, from conscientious building and design. Quite apart from this unbiddable dimension, the so-called “penultimate dimension,” there is still more than enough for us to do if the building of the church, and the separate steps which go into it, are going to end in useful result. This resulting creation would be the work not only of the architect and the artists, but also of the involved parish and congregation . . . and of the Spirit.

¹² Werner, *Sakralität*, 88-9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 93-7.